

THE CUSTODIANSHIP OF OUR LITERATURE.

No. 1.

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The finest compliment, we think, ever paid to our language is couched in one of the brilliant perorations of that gifted and learned Brahmin, Luximon Roy, during a course of lectures upon "America and American Institutions." We cannot now reproduce the original terms of the expression, for, like all Oriental speakers and writers, he indulged in a beautiful word picture, whose softly-blended tints and charming perspective vanished with the subsidence of his mellow and sonorous voice; we may be able to represent, however, so much of the ground plan or profile as our memory retains.

The speaker proceeded to show that while such languages as the ancient Hebrew, Sanscrit and Syriac, by an intimate union of their ligatures and integuments, justly constituted the trunk of the great tree of human speech, the Greek, Latin, Arabic and Anglo-Saxon might be considered as some of the principal branches; the immediate outgrowth of these latter, represented by the modern, cultivated languages of Europe, were the projected boughs, and the lesser dialects and vernacular tongues were typical of the smaller subdivisions and twigs. Lastly, as if to crown and glorify the whole, the English language was the gorgeous, polypetulous and redolent flower of this giant tree, now in the acme of its strength and noon-day bloom.

Such, then, is the peculiar genius of that language which the early thinkers and writers of the world have confided to our keeping; and the predominating phase of our present literature should clearly show with how much fidelity we are acquitting ourselves of the sacred obligations imposed upon us.

Not only have we in the United States a purely Anglo-American language, but we readily undertake to say that there are just as distinctive features in the eastern and western flanks of our national literature as ever existed in the Attic, Ionic, Doric and Eolic dialects of the Greek language. Hence it was not all a jest when a leading publisher of Boston declared that he could locate eastern and western manuscripts by the style alone, without ever reading the names of the respective authors.

In view of the facts already stated, it is but the legitimate result of a natural impulse that every true American scholar should feel justifiably proud of his country's language and literature. To our best speakers and writers, then, should we look for the preservation, intact, of our noble tongue, now the regal highway of the world's grandest and loftiest thoughts. But not to our literary producers alone do we look. True, they may sow and reap; they may verily produce and stock our markets, but we are inclined to believe, after all, that the leading journals and periodicals of our land are destined to be the true custodians of such garnered fruits.

No sooner were the classic haunts of Greece and Rome overrun by the barbarous hordes of Northern Europe, and their temples of learning profaned by the unprovoked onsets of ignorance and rudeness, than their respective languages began to relapse and decline. What the Latin suffered from the inroads of foreign and ungainly idioms, the Greek lost in euphony and sweetness.

The transition from the brilliant Golden to the more subdued Silver Age was, comparatively speaking, almost imperceptible, and the best critics then flourishing noted not the change. The loftiest flights of Ovid, Livy and Cæsar Germanicus were not a whit in advance of the genius that pervaded the writings of Celsus, Pliny and Seneca. From the Silver to the Brazen Age, however, the change was more abrupt and apparent. The plebeians now marveled when they heard strange voices and shrank from the ominous signs of the times. Lastly, and more fatal than all, the Iron Age was heralded by the thunder of mail-clad horsemen, the clash of resounding steel and the storming of beleaguered towns and cities.

Let no one be startled when we say that our own language and its elegant literature is immediately threatened by a fate essentially similar to that which befell the Latin and Greek tongues during that desert and obscure period of more than a thousand years in profane history, the Dark Ages. And what is all the more in this instance to be deplored is the stubborn fact that the modern Goths and Vandals which well nigh overwhelm us on every side are of our own flesh and blood, if not out-and-out cousins-german; nay, and like the evil spirits that tormented the Gadarene

who came out of the tombs, they are a clamorous crew and their name is legion. Hundreds of unscrupulous and irresponsible scribblers, uncircumcised in even the first principles of rhetoric or logic, but aided and abetted by such newspapers and magazines as delight to tolerate them as caterers, are flooding and demoralizing our book-stalls, public libraries and reading rooms with a villainous trash which every righteous legislature should peremptorily consign to the flames.

Unrestrained by law or fashion, the insidious influence of this spurious reading matter is finding its way into our homes and social gatherings; it invades the sanctity of the fireside circle and crops out in the prattling speech of our children. Hence will be seen the *modus operandi* of this moral scourge in deteriorating our common vernacular and national literature.

But it is consoling to know that we have yet a few conscientious writers and publishers in our land who may, by dint of indefatigable exertion, control the balance of power.

A first-class hotel, capable of accommodating forty boarders, is now in course of construction at the springs, at Collins' Landing, on the Columbia river. The proprietors, who are enterprising gentlemen from California, expect to have the place in full blast early next summer. The WEST SHORE was the first journal which called public attention to the valuable medical properties of these springs, and it is somewhat gratifying to us that the purchase which was effected in consequence of the article which appeared in the WEST SHORE, is so satisfactory to the present owners, that they would not part with the place at any price.

Chinese immigration threatens to swamp the native population of the Hawaiian Islands. The Chinese, all males, already amount to one-fifth the entire population, and the arrivals in the last half year reported were 2,000, nearly four per cent. of the native population, and a larger number than the entire Chinese on the islands in 1874.

A reptile of the lizard species, several feet in length, has been discovered in the valley of the Gila river, which seems too mysterious and terrible for our Zoological Gardens. It possesses, according to the description, the power of paralyzing a man or animal with its poisonous breath.